
Family Matters



Quarterly News & Information About Kentucky's Family Courts

April 2001

FAMILY COURT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

THIS ISSUE

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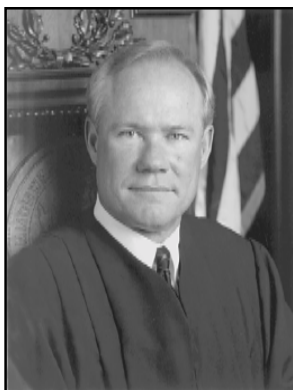
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I am pleased that the 2001 General Assembly has passed an amendment to the Kentucky Constitution specifically authorizing Family Courts in Kentucky. The Amendment, Senate Bill 58, will be submitted to the voters of Kentucky on the 2002 general election ballot.

While Family Court has resources beyond those normally associated with court function, its legal basis is as a hybrid of both Circuit and District Courts. The reasoning behind Family Court is the recognition that problems involving one member of

the family often do not exist in a vacuum. If there are issues of truancy, dependency, or abuse and neglect, then those issues often lead to additional problems for a family, including domestic violence, separation, and divorce. By giving the authority to one court and one judge to oversee all the problems involving one family, it is hoped that the children and families of Kentucky can be helped in their return to normal lives.

Unlike traditional Circuit and District Courts, Family Courts are designed to work with counselors, social workers, drug and alcohol dependency treatment providers and other "helping professions" that get to the root cause of a family's problems. With one judge overseeing all of a family's problems and progress, restored lives can be achieved.

The General Assembly has done a great service for Kentucky's families by passing the Family Court Amendment. We must now make our case to the voters of Kentucky on the importance of this effort. We plan a grass roots campaign to educate every Kentucky voter on the importance of Family Courts.

While we have eighteen Family Court judges working in ten Circuits and Districts, there remain 105 Kentucky counties without the benefits of this innovation. With passage of the amendment next year, it is my hope that we can begin the expansion of Family Courts which could eventually be brought to every Kentucky county.

Kentucky's family matters is a forum for the exchange of ideas and information relevant to family courts. The viewpoints expressed in the articles submitted do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the Administrative Office of the Courts. The Dept. of Family Court does not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in submitted articles and is not responsible for any errors, omissions, or results obtained from use of the information.

FAMILY COURT SITE UPDATES

FLOYD...

*Dovie Damron
Court Administrator*

Floyd Family Court added to its jurisdiction Knott and Magoffin counties (36th Circuit) as of March 1, 2001. Family Court Councils and a Divorce Education Program will be implemented into both of these counties.

Jennifer Patton, staff attorney and Debbie Woods, secretary have resigned and we welcome to our staff Sherry Ratliff, secretary and Barry Davis, law clerk. Sherry comes to us with 20 years experience with the Floyd County Board of Education. She has been involved with family court as a Families in Transition (FIT) facilitator since its inception. Barry is a graduate of Jones Law School in Montgomery, Alabama. He has worked with judicial campaigns in Alabama and was the finance director for the Democrat party in South Carolina. He, his wife Betty and their two year old daughter Ally have moved back to Floyd county to be close to their families.

We have been overwhelmed with "Lou Bears" and with quilts from homemaker groups in Floyd county. "Lou Bears" are small stuffed bears made by Lou Parks for children appearing in family court. Our goal is to make sure that every child taken out of their home pursuant to an EPO is given a quilt and a bear in a backpack (when available).

Our children's waiting room will be moving to a more accessible space across from the District Courtroom.

JEFFERSON...

*Jim Birmingham
Court Administrator*

Effective **November 30, 2000**, Judge Joseph W. O'Reilly was appointed to Jefferson Family Court to succeed Judge Denise Clayton who was appointed to Jefferson Circuit Court. Judge Joseph O'Reilly was General Counsel at the State Public

Protection and Regulations Cabinet. He was in private practice from 1995 to 1997, and was previously General Counsel at Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield. Judge O'Reilly practiced with several firms from 1974 to 1989.

Effective **December 1, 2000**, Judge Hugh Smith Haynie Jr. was appointed to Jefferson Family Court to succeed retired Judge Mary Corey. Judge Haynie had been with the Commonwealth Attorneys Office for nine years. He was a special prosecutor for the Project Backfire, a multi-agency effort to prosecute gun related crimes. He was named prosecutor of the year by Kentuckian's Voice for Crime Victims in 1994.

Effective **January 16, 2001**, Richard Lewis became the newest staff attorney with the Family Court Legal Staff. He replaces Mary Jo Gleason who transferred to Circuit Court. Mr. Lewis moved back to Kentucky from Costa Mesa, California. He received his law degree from Western State University in Fullerton, California and had been in private practice since 1994.

Congratulations to Mary Lou Cambron, Dr. Joe Brown, and Dr. Pamela Yankeelov for the publication in the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Journal Fall 2000 edition of their article "Developing Court - Connected Parent Divorce Education Programs, Guidelines for Communities." The article answers a myriad of questions that program providers and communities might consider when developing a divorce education program for parents and children.

Mary Lou Cambron, has worked as a Family Court Support Worker since 1991. She helped create the Families in Transition program and currently acts as the Educational Coordinator and Court Liaison. Her interests include developing court-related programs.

Pamela A. Yankeelov, is an Assistant Professor at the Kent School of Social Work, University of Louisville. She has been the Program Evaluator for the Families in Transition program since 1998. She has published in the Journal of

Social Behavior and Personality, Journal of Social Issues, Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, and Family Ministry.

Joe H. Brown, is a Professor at the University of Louisville in the Family Therapy department of the Kent School of Social Work. Dr. Brown created the Families in Transition program and has acted as the Director of the program since its inception in 1992. He has authored numerous articles and books, and serves on the editorial board of Family and Conciliation Courts Review.

PIKE...

*Joyce Worrix
Support Worker*

Pike Family Court has been extremely busy the last six months in several areas. Subcommittees have been meeting and some old projects have been completed and new projects are in the works.

Community Partnership Committee - (i) worked with the Regional Collaboration for Children Committee which received funds for parenting classes and the Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs for 5 counties; (ii) working with the Big Sandy Area Child Advocacy Center in obtaining a grant through the Kentucky Bar Foundation for funds to make videos and materials for the Kids in Court Education Program; and, (iii) worked with the Cabinet for Families & Children, the Big Sandy Area Child Advocacy Center and the Regional Collaboration for Children Committee regarding the events for Child Abuse Prevention Month (April).

Guardian Ad Litem Committee - completed the Guardian Ad Litem List brochure.

Juvenile Committee - working on assessments for domestic violence cases and drug abuse cases involving children.

Families in Transition Program Committee - had a new training session and added six new facilitators and are working on adding another site to be available by midsummer. Completed a day-to-day calendar entitled "A Lifetime of Memories" to be given to the parents at the classes. The calendar provides some suggestions

for spending time as a family.

Domestic Violence Committee - worked with the Brochure Committee in completing the "Emergency Protective Orders and Domestic Violence Safety Plan" brochure.

Counseling Committee - working on a brochure which consists of mental health professionals and providers in our area with a brief statement about the type of counseling provided and the costs.

Children's Waiting Area Committee - working with the Big Sandy Area Child Advocacy Center in obtaining a grant through the Kentucky Bar Foundation to employ two individuals to care for the children in the Children's Waiting Area.

Brochure Committee - (i) have two brochures completed and are now being distributed: "Emergency Protective Orders and Domestic Violence Safety Plan" and "Resource Guide for Temporary Custodians"; (ii) the "Parenting Guidelines and Standard Visitation" brochure will be completed by May, 2001; and, (iii) working on a Resource Manual that will provide information on all the resources available in Pike County.

On March 30, 2001, Judge Thompson was the guest speaker at a "Child Abuse Prevention Month" ceremony. Pike County Judge Executive, Karen Gibson, signed a Proclamation stating that the month of April shall be proclaimed as "Child Abuse Prevention Month in Pike County".



Family Court Judge Larry Thompson tied blue ribbons onto poles in front of the courthouse to symbolize child abuse awareness.

Pike Family Court, in conjunction with the Department of Protection and Permanency and the Big Sandy Area Child Advocacy Center, have planned events throughout the month of April, i.e., balloon releases from each elementary school in the county, placing billboards throughout the county, placing leaflets on vehicles and in various businesses, and hosting a luncheon on April 24th.

In recognition of Dr. Seuss' birthday, Judge Thompson read Dr. Seuss books to elementary students.

Local high school students, participated in a Mock Trial conducted by Judge Thompson.

Judge Thompson and staff would like to send best wishes to Glenda Lyons who left our office in February as Court Administrator to take a position as a Court Designated Worker in Jefferson County. We would like to welcome Raquel Anderson as our new Court Administrator and Tamila Sword as our new Judicial Secretary.



The balloon release, pictured above, is just one of the events that was held in Pike County to recognize April as "Child Abuse Prevention Month".

McCRACKEN ...

*Nita Pursley
Court Administrator*

Judge Cynthia Sanderson was honored to receive the award for the Foster Care Review Board Family Court Judge of the Year at a presentation dinner in Lexington in November, 2000. Judge Sanderson was nominated for the award by Anita Williams, the chair of the Foster Care Committee of the McCracken Family Court Advisory Council. We are grateful to this committee for all the help they have been to our court and so proud of the service they provide to our community. On April 15, 2001 the committee arranged training for foster parents with Judge Sanderson and District Judge Bard Brian.

We are in our second school year of Truancy Court and making improvements in the program with each session. Mr. Neil Archer has assumed the chairmanship of the Truancy Committee and he works closely with our Case Specialist, Lyell Collins, to keep the quality of the program high. Mr. Collins sought the assistance of school personnel in the family resource centers to design and implement a standard curriculum for the six-week program. Each family in the program has a mentor who follows up on the child's attendance, and helps the family seek assistance from various community resources when appropriate. In a couple of schools attendance has improved so much that no students in those schools have enough absences to qualify for the Truancy Court program. Nothing could please us more than to work ourselves out of a job with the Truancy Court program!

The Status Offenders Committee of our Advisory Council has reorganized with Rob Betts of the Court Designated Workers Office as the new chair. We have also added a new Child Support Committee with Kathy Jones from the Women Aware Office as the chair. These committees will be meeting with the judge in the next few weeks to define their goals. Mr. Mike Paul from the Four Rivers Behavioral Health Office is the new Chair of the Community Services, Resources and

Committee. Mr. Paul's committee is working on a resource guide to be distributed from Family Court.

In addition to Truancy Court, McCracken Family Court has several other programs up and running. The *Families in Transition* divorce education program is required by our local rules for all divorcing couples with minor children. We often receive calls praising the program and believe it is easing the stress involved in dissolution of marriage cases. Domestic Violence Information Classes are offered by Women Aware to anyone seeking an Emergency Protective Order. We have a program for families with children who have been in court for juvenile status offenses or in dependency, abuse and neglect court called *Creating Lasting Family Connections*. These classes meet for five consecutive Wednesday evenings at the courthouse. Mr. Joe Vance of the Four Rivers Regional Prevention Center coordinates and conducts these sessions for the court to help the families learn about conflict resolution, communication skills and family dynamics. The program most recently implemented is *Turning It Around* for parents who are behind in child support payments. The goal of the TIA program is to create a bond between absent parents and their children and to encourage the regular payment of child support.

We would like to say farewell to Lyell Collins and wish him the best with his new job in Carson City, Nevada. Please welcome Temple Jackson as our new Case Specialist. Temple attended Paducah Community College before transferring to Western Kentucky University. She graduated with a bachelor of science degree in social work. Since graduation from Western, she worked for Women Aware, Inc. as a social worker. She was involved in various programs sponsored by Family Court.

AND, wedding bells are ringing in McCracken Family Court. Jane Osborne, our Staff Attorney, got married February 17 and Judge Sanderson married on February 20. Both have chosen grooms approved by the rest of the Family Court staff and we congratulate them and wish them well.

Students Assist Franklin Family Court Project



Franklin County High School freshman Bruce Bohman worked on a balloon and gingerbread mural in the Children's Room at the Family Court building. Art students from FCHS got involved with the project through the Franklin County HERO Club, a community service program at the school, which has been helping the Children's Room get up and running at the courthouse. The HERO club has also been accepting donations for the room, such as toys, books and decorations.



Junior Becky Winfield works on painting the mural in the Children's Room.

NEW FAMILY COURT SPECIALIST AT AOC



The Department of Family Courts is pleased to welcome **Robin G. Fisher** as the new Family Court Specialist. Robin fills the vacancy created by Angie DeHart's departure from AOC. Robin comes to our department after having

worked in the Jefferson County Court Administrator's Office and Jefferson County Family Court. Robin is a magna cum laude graduate from the University of Kentucky where she received her B.S. in Family Studies in 1995. In 2000, Robin received her J.D. from the Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville.

Robin brings a unique perspective to the Department of Family Courts. She spent over two years working in Kentucky's largest judicial system in Jefferson County; however, her roots are in rural Kentucky in Pulaski County. Robin's first job in the legal system required her to travel the Pulaski, Lincoln, and Rockcastle, 28th Judicial Circuit. She understands the needs of Kentucky's rural courts and can appreciate the similarities and differences of court systems across the state.

Robin looks forward to working closely with our rural family courts. Feel free to contact her at (502) 573-2350, ext. 2145 for assistance or with questions about programs or upcoming events.

**Celebrate
Family Court Month
June 2001**

DIVORCE EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The second Divorce Education Conference was held at Natural Bridge State Park on March 9, 2001. Facilitators from across the state gathered to share program ideas and network with other Divorce Education providers. Participants attended breakout sessions that focused on program support, children's programs, and group dynamics. Joe H. Brown, Ph.D and Mary Lou Cambron, MSSW presented lectures on history and trends of divorce education. During the final session of the conference, participants divided into work groups to share objectives and goals of their existing programs. At the conclusion of the conference, participants were given the opportunity to share with the entire group their trends in divorce education programs. The information shared by each group provided a foundation of ideas and inspirations which participants were excited to take back to their home counties for possible implementation. The Department of Family Courts anticipates that the hard work of the participants at the conference will ensure enhanced divorce education programs and a positive new start for Kentucky families during a difficult time in their lives.

Take a Walk on the Child Side

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Project of Jefferson County is recruiting volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children involved in the family court system. Volunteers, who are appointed by the Court and of at least 21 years of age, work with others involved with the case toward the child's placement in a permanent home. The basis of the CASA concept is that every child has a right to a safe, permanent home. Volunteers spend one to four hours per week on one case at a time. For more information about our next volunteer class, please contact CASA, office at (502) 595-4911 or e-mail us at casajc@aol.com.

JUVENILE DRUG COURT

*Judge Debra Hembree Lambert
Family Court Judge
Lincoln, Pulaski and Rockcastle Counties*



The Juvenile Drug Court for the 28th Judicial Circuit is up and running! Our Coordinator, Dalton Miller has been very busy with assessments of participants and monitoring several teens. I meet weekly with the participants and have the honor of encouraging the hard work and progress made by most.

When I first became Family Court Judge, I was most intimidated by the juvenile cases. Though my background was in Child and Family Studies (or because it was!) I dreaded the work with teens. Perhaps because what scares us most motivates us most, my staff and I actively sought successful programs to model. All of us were stunned at the level of drug use in our juveniles. Just weeks after we began, staff members wrote grant applications seeking funding for a juvenile drug court. Ironically, the day I learned of funding was the day I learned of a positive drug screen for PCP in a 14 year old truancy kid! We knew hard work was ahead.

Though our Court is new (beginning in November 2000), we already have a young man in Level II who is telling everyone about the perils of drug use. New participants are coming on rapidly. Dalton and I and our Planning Committee went to our first training session in March as a group. Everyone is very excited about all the possibilities for recovery that our court offers.

Though my district serves approximately 100,000 people and my caseload is staggering, I have received a tremendous amount of personal joy from this “extra” work. Getting to know the children and being a part of the healing of their lives has been therapeutic for the Judge as well!

Key Component of Drug Courts:

- * recognition that incarceration only removes offenders from their drug-abusing lifestyle for a period of time
- * mandatory alcohol and drug treatment programs working to break drug-abusers from their destructive cycle
- * prosecutors and defense attorneys partnering in a team effort to promote public safety and protect the participants rights
- * frequent and random drug and alcohol testing
- * sanctions for noncompliance, incentives for compliance
- * efforts between public agencies to enhance effectiveness of program and generate community support

From the Research Desk of Ken Mattingly...

Work continues on our *Comprehensive Handbook for Administrators of Family Courts in Rural Areas*. Draft copies will be distributed to participants scheduled to attend our upcoming national conference scheduled for May 17 - 19, 2001 at the Holiday Inn Hurstbourne in Louisville.

Sponsored by the State Justice Institute and Kentucky's Administrative Office of the Courts the conference will feature multiple sessions focusing upon rural court administration. Confirmed speakers include Judge Patricia Macias of El Paso, Texas and Chief Justice Joseph Lambert. Judicial leadership and court community collaboration will be Judge Macias' topic. Chief Justice Lambert will offer his thoughts on Kentucky's family court experience during a plenary session on the conference's opening day.

Dr. Joe Brown, Ph.D. and Dr. Riaan van Zyl, Ph.D. are scheduled to present conference participants a synopsis of the project's research. Survey data compiled from Kentucky's nine new family courts will be incorporated into the handbook. Family court personnel have the opportunity to respond to an on-line questionnaire via electronic mail. The survey complements information obtained from our qualitative research sites. Rural family courts in other localities outside Kentucky have been contacted requesting participation in our data collection effort.

The handbook's final publication is scheduled for early summer. National distribution will occur in July, 2001.

***"Coming together is a Beginning,
Talking together is a Process and
Working together is a Success"***

- Henry Ford

UPCOMING EVENTS

Foster Care Training
McCracken..... April 15, 2001
Guardian Ad Litem Training
Warren Justice Center April 19, 2001
Family Services Training
Warren Justice Center April 20, 2001
Warren Family Court
Open House and Reception .. April 20, 2001
Rural Family Courts
Conference/Louisville May 17-19, 2001
Committee for Parent's Apart
Fayette May 30, 2001
Guardian Ad Litem Training
Pike/ Floyd..... June 7, 2001
Family Services Training
Floyd/Pike June 8, 2001



After several requests from Family Court staff, we are pleased to offer Family Court shirts which are available for order, at cost, in a variety of styles and colors. For more information please call The Department of Family Courts at (502) 573-2350.

RULING FROM THE BENCH

*Judge Juda Maria Hellmann
Jefferson Family Court Judge*

When I was campaigning to be elected as a Family Court Judge, many attorneys told me, “just make a decision if you become judge”, a cautious reminder to be sensitive to the length of time it can take to render a decision. I concluded, at that moment, no matter how difficult ruling from the bench would be for me, that I would make that my first priority as a new Family Court Judge. I believe that litigants involved in family issues deserve an immediate decision. I also believe that it is important that a judge, face-to-face, renders this decision. This means that the judge explains to the litigants and their attorneys his or her decision, and why the judge ruled that way. This face-to-face decision can foster emotional healing for the parties, allowing parties to move on with their lives. Ruling from the bench promotes closure, allowing the parties to effectively understand why a decision was rendered for, or against them, or just why a decision was rendered. It also relieves the attorneys from attempting to explain the written word to their clients. Life-altering decisions, e.g. maintenance, awards of property, custody or visitation issues, need not be shared with litigants by counsel over the phone or in the attorney’s office. These significant deliberations should be explained to the parties and attorneys by the judge in person.

Since January 2000, I have been ruling from the bench in district and circuit cases. I only assign trial dates from a case management conference or a pre-trial to inform the attorneys of time expectations, to remind them of their ability to take depositions, and to encourage other forms of preparation prior to trial. During a custody hearing, I will give time limits to each attorney, listening carefully to all of the evidence. I generally have the appropriate statutes or case law in front of me, and render a custody decision at the close of the case. If necessary, I will go to my chambers to review materials or double check a citation before ruling from the bench.

I set time limits for attorneys to encourage presentation of a concise set of facts and legal arguments from each attorney. Establishing time limits for attorneys can decrease “revenge” testimony, and/or the introduction of irrelevant evidence. The attorneys are timed in my courtroom, with my sheriff giving them five-minute, and one-minute warnings. Initially, some attorneys objected to this, voicing concerns that they could never put on all their witnesses or make all their points to the judge. After these attorneys presented their cases, and I rendered a decision, these attorneys agreed that time limits could be effective. Judicial time is a precious resource (e.g., I hear over one hundred cases each week).

It is essential to have attorneys who are prepared and can present best evidence within the time limits. Generally my experience as a judge is sufficient to determine what time limitation to set, and to know whether I have heard enough evidence to render a decision according to the statutory or case law requirements. There have been some cases in which I have extended the time limits, knowing that a critical witness had not testified. When I place attorneys on time guidelines, the attorneys will expedite their discovery, including filing expert reports and depositions, so that this does not count toward their court time. Judges must be prepared in order to render a decision from the bench, which means having reviewed depositions and reports prior to taking the bench on that day.

I will sometimes request an attorney draft the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, per my specific instructions. At this stage litigants have already received a verbal decision and will receive a written consistent decision upon my draft and approval of the order. If I am unable to make a decision the day that the case is heard, I continue to another day, having parties and attorneys present, so that I can render my decision face-to-face.

I find that my issuing a face-to-face ruling is very rewarding for the parties and the attorneys. I believe it is my duty and service as a Family Court Judge to help families to the best of my abilities. The best of my abilities is to give them a sound, well-reasoned decision as soon as possible. There is no better time to render a decision than when you have just weighed the evidence, and experienced whether witnesses were credible.

Sometimes parties and attorneys will become angry and upset by the ruling. Judges should be prepared for this by talking directly to the losing party, and giving factual and legal reasons supporting the order. Often a party may not benefit from the judge’s words until after leaving the courtroom.

One direct benefit from ruling from the bench - no cases under submission. With no cases under submission, I can focus upon carefully listening to the next case, and thus continue successfully ruling from the bench.

A token of love

Woman's crafts comfort youngest victims of divorce

by Kathy J. Prater / Staff Writer
Floyd County Times

Attending Family Court can be a stressful time for those children who find themselves caught in the middle between feuding parents and well-meaning social workers. It can be a time of confusion riddled with doubts. The child involved often wonders, "Who can I trust?" and, "Is all this commotion my fault?"

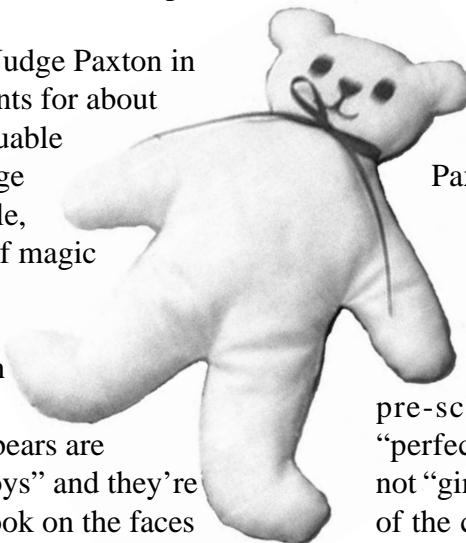
Family Court Judge Julie Paxton says she does all she can to calm these doubts and to erase any fears. It can be tough, at times, to break through the silence and develop a rapport with the children. Judge Paxton said she wants each child in her court to know that they can trust her, that she is there to help bring calm days and stability into their often troubled lives.

She has an ally in this mission to help children. Her name is Cecelia Parks, or as Judge Paxton call her, "Lou."

Parks has been aiding Judge Paxton in with her young court participants for about contribution has been an invaluable

Parks creates what Judge A "Lou Bear" is soft and simple, that is drawn on with the use of magic red string tie.

Judge Paxton presents to come through her court with the children whether they be adolescents. She said that the bears are Paxton. "The bears are not "boys" and they're "fussy." Paxton said that the look on the faces of the children when she hands them a "Lou Bear" is a wonderful sight to see. Parks said that she just wanted to do something to "help the children." Everybody can do a little something to help a child," Parks said that when she first heard that a special



developing a trusting relationship two years and Paxton said that her service to her office.

Paxton affectionately calls "Lou Bears". made of muslin sheeting with a face markers. It is topped off with a simple

each and every child that has cause a "Lou Bear." She said that it delights pre-schoolers, pre-teens or teenage "perfect". "The design is just right," said not "girls". They're not big or too small or too

of the children when she hands them a "Lou Bear" is a wonderful sight to see. Parks said that she just wanted to do something to "help the children." Everybody can do a little something to help a child," Parks said that when she first heard that a special

waiting room had been designed for the children whose families were in court, she wondered what she could do to help out. She knew that the waiting room was equipped with toys and as she thought about the children she thought it would be “nice if the children could take something home with them.”

Parks and Judge Paxton had already become acquainted at an earlier time and Parks had, as a matter of fact, worked on Judge Paxton’s campaign when she was running to be elected as Family Court judge. Parks said that she had never been the type of person who got involved in politics, but that she “just loves Julie Paxton” and she wanted to help out with the campaign. Parks said that she thinks that the creation of the Family Court has “been great” and that she “believes in Julie as a person”, and felt that she would make a wonderful Family Court judge.

Paxton said that her experience with the Family Court system has been an excellent one and that she loves what she is doing. She said that many people have come to her and asked what they could do to help. She said that several people continue to bring good used toys and often, brand new toys to the children’s waiting room.

Paxton said that children are allowed to take toys home with them, that is “no problem. There is nothing in that room that can’t be replaced.”

“Lou’s Bears,” though have been the best thing going according to Judge Paxton. She said that when she hands a child a “Lou Bear”, an amazing transformation takes place. She said that the children just “absolutely love” the bears and it pleases them that the bear was made especially for them by a “very special lady.”

Judge Paxton said that the bears open the gateway to communication between she and the children, that once she gives them a bear, they realize that she is a person just like them and not just “a judge.”

Paxton said that once the children begin to hold their bears, they start to become a lot less tense and much more open with her.

Paxton said that many children fear that they alone will have to make the difficult decision that will solve the conflict between their parents. Paxton said that once she informs them that they do not have to make this decision, she can see relief wash over them.

“That is one of the things that make the bears so special”, said Paxton, “they create a positive memory for the children” out of a situation that is difficult for them. No matter the outcome, the children have a nice memory that they can take home with them.

The judge also goes on to say that “there is something magical” about Lou and her bears. Just when I get low on my supply and start to run out, Lou calls and tells me she has some more ready for me to pick up.

Parks said that she comes from a large family of six children. She said that she has 10 nieces and nephews, although she has no children of her own. “I just love children, and I feel that if a person can do something to help a child, that is a good thing.” Park’s said “That is what I wanted to do when I came up with this idea -- help a child. Parks is very humble about her contribution, giving credit to Judge Paxton for her efforts in working with the children.

Judge Paxton, on the other hand, gives credit to Parks and all the other individuals who help with her court and the children’s waiting area.

“Family Court has just been great,” said Paxton. “People come to me asking what they can do to help. I don’t even have to ask.”

Parks said that she can make the bear pattern available to any interested persons who would like to help produce the bears for Judge Paxton to give away. If you would like to help, contact the Family Court office at (606) 886-9901.

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